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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BOGOTA 001374

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SUBJECT: URIBE SAYS ONLY THE INTERNATIONAL RED CROSS AND
THE CATHOLIC CHURCH ARE AUTHORIZED TO FACILITATE FURTHER
FARC HOSTAGE RELEASES

REF: BOGOTA 1338

Classified By: Political Counselor John Creamer
Reasons 1.4 (b and d)

SUMMARY

1. (C) President Uribe ruled out any role for Piedad Cordoba and her "Colombians for Peace" group in further FARC hostage releases at a Town Hall meeting on April 25, saying only the ICRC and Catholic Church are authorized to facilitate such releases. Uribe said the GOC would not allow new releases to turn into "spectacles" benefiting "persons who should be in jail" because of their FARC ties. Peace Commissioner Frank Pearl told us the GOC wants direct, private talks with the FARC, not contact through political actors such as Cordoba's group. Cordoba told the media she plans to meet with Brazilian President Lula de Silva to discuss a possible Brazilian role in new releases, but the Brazilian Political Counselor told us Itamaraty is unaware of any Lula-Cordoba meeting. The ICRC's chief in Bogota told us he is frustrated by the GOC's and Cordoba's politicization of the hostage issue. End Summary.

ONLY ICRC AND CHURCH IN HOSTAGE RELEASES

2. (U) President Alvaro Uribe announced in an April 25 televised Town Hall meeting near Bogota that only the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and Catholic Church are authorized to assist in new FARC hostage releases. Uribe did not mention Senator Piedad Cordoba or her "Colombians for Peace" group by name, but his statements effectively ruled out her participation in hostage releases--including the possible release of FARC-held hostage Pablo Moncayo. The FARC announced on April 16, it would release Moncayo to Colombians for Peace (reftel). Uribe said the GOC is ready to facilitate any FARC hostage release, but only through the ICRC or the Church.

URIBE SLAMS "FARC-POLITICIANS"

3. (U) Uribe said the GOC would not accept the FARC's hostage blackmail, or allow the group to turn hostage releases into a "political feast" benefiting "persons who should be in jail because of their FARC ties." Uribe said the GOC had not yielded to blackmail from former paramilitaries, and would not accept it from the FARC. He noted that numerous congressmen remain in jail in the "para-political" scandal,

and said the GOC would not permit the FARC to "place smoke screens over the FARC-political scandal." The GOC would not allow anyone to "advance their political campaigns based on an inhumane humanitarian spectacle" that exploits human suffering. Uribe said the GOC would resist domestic and international pressure to accept the FARC's demands.

URIBE COLORED BY DISLIKE OF CORDOBA

14. (C) New GOC Peace Commissioner Frank Pearl told us on April 27 that Uribe's comments reflect the GOC view that direct, private talks with the FARC, whether on a humanitarian accord or a broader peace process, are preferable to contact through intermediaries such as Cordoba. If the FARC is interested in a unilateral humanitarian hostage release, humanitarian institutions such as the ICRC and the Catholic Church exist to assist. Cordoba and Colombians for Peace are not humanitarian actors; they are political actors interested in influencing the 2010 presidential elections. Pearl confirmed that Cordoba has not tried to meet with him to discuss the possible Moncayo release. Pearl said he tried to speak with Moncayo's peace activist father, Gustavo Moncayo, but Moncayo has directed all contact back to Cordoba.

15. (C) After the FARC hostage releases earlier this year, then Peace Commissioner Luis Carlos Restrepo told us Uribe has a visceral negative reaction to the FARC-controlled releases, as well as to Cordoba's participation. The releases also generate opposition within Uribe's administration and political base, including Defense Minister

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Juan Manuel Santos and Armed Forces Commander Freddy Padilla.

As a result, Uribe's approach to the releases is often improvised and unpredictable. In February, Uribe announced his suspension of any further Cordoba role in the FARC releases, only to reinstate her hours later.

BRAZILIAN ROLE?

16. (C) Pearl said he has not spoken with the Brazilians about a possible role in the Moncayo release. Brazil provided logistical support for the last round of FARC hostage releases in January-February, and Cordoba told the media that President Luiz Inacio Lula de Silva has agreed to meet with her to discuss the issue. Brazilian Political Counselor in Bogota Alan Coelho said he checked with Itamaraty on April 27, which was unaware of any Lula-Cordoba meeting. Still, he said Cordoba maintains some contacts within the Brazilian Congress who might try to set up a session. He added that Cordoba has had no contact with the Brazilian Embassy since the last round of hostage releases. Even then, the only contact was in multilateral meetings involving the ICRC and GOC as well.

ICRC VIEW

17. (C) ICRC delegate Christophe Beney voiced frustration with both Cordoba and the GOC, noting that both view hostage releases through a political lens. He told Pearl that the ICRC is willing to help in another release, but will not act as the GOC's representative--"as Cordoba serves as the FARC's lawyer"--in negotiations. The ICRC wants the GOC and Cordoba to work out the details and will then help with implementation. He stressed that the ICRC wants to keep a low media profile, something increasingly difficult because both parties often lie about what is happening.

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